

## Chisenhale Gallery's conceptual critique of neoliberalism is being funded by credit default swaps

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*Maria Eichhorn's '5 weeks, 25 days, 175 hours', 2016. Photo: Andy Keate, Chisenhale Gallery*

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Over the next five weeks, visitors to East London's Chisenhale Gallery will find the metal doors closed and a notice outside, in museum-style text, stating that the exhibition by Maria Eichhorn entitled *5 Weeks, 25 Days, 175 Hours* consists of the staff not working and the gallery being shut. It then states that the exhibition 'opened' with a symposium on the first day of its run and that audio recordings of it are available on the website.

Closing a gallery for the duration of an exhibition is not a new artistic strategy. Daniel Buren blocked the door to his solo exhibition at Galleria Apollinaire, Milan, in 1968 and the following year Robert Barry hung a sign on a gallery door stating 'during the exhibition the gallery will be closed'. Eichhorn's gesture at the Chisenhale, while hardly original, is recognisable as a fairly conventional piece of conceptual art.

The reason for reviving this strategy now almost fifty years after Buren and Barry can be gleaned from the broadcasts of the symposium available on the gallery website. Eichhorn, a Berlin-based artist, has asked the gallery staff to 'withdraw their labour' in order to substitute leisure and free time in place of work. The exhibition aims to question why work should be synonymous with production and highlight the precariousness of low-paid jobs in a neoliberal economy.

The exhibition's content is not a conventional show of works but instead is generated by what the Chisenhale's workers do with their paid free-time over the next five weeks and the reaction to the project. But then again all exhibitions generate reaction so this latter aim is not in any way exclusive to this project. The former aim might be interesting if what the workers get up to was made known at the end of the exhibition but this isn't the case. They could get together a band of mercenaries, phone up Mark Thatcher and invade a small African country and we wouldn't be any the wiser.

Moreover what the workers get up to on their five weeks is, of course, part taxpayer funded. The Chisenhale receives around £165,000 per year from the taxpayer via Arts Council England and this sum accounts for around half the staff's salaries and building overheads. When this issue was briefly raised at the symposium a representative of the gallery floated an idea the gallery had considered but not adopted which was that, because tax-payers money accounts for only 50 per cent of salary and running costs, that portion could apply more to other exhibitions through the year rather than this one (for example the entire second half of the year's programme). This reasoning is, of course, creative accounting at its neoliberal best: the gallery's Arts Council funding is not project-based, it is for the entirety of the three-year funding period.

Tower Hamlets, the borough that the gallery is located in, was rated as the 24th most deprived borough out of 326 areas reported on by the Indices of Deprivation in 2015. Its taxpayers along with the rest of us, are at least part-funding the five-week jolly and in return cannot access the gallery or reach the staff. To what extent those involved with the exhibition are in touch with such concerns

is debatable. At one point in the symposium one of the two academics invited to speak exclaimed 'I'm deeply coming from Foucault when I talk about that!' and referenced Derrida enthusiastically.

Sadly none of the speakers commented on the fact that a good portion of the rest of the funding for the show comes from a gallery trustee, Shane Akeroyd, who is a senior staff member of Markit, a firm who specialise in the field of credit default swaps. Complex world, this neoliberalism. Still, for those who like their gallery visits brief, Maria Eichhorn's *5 weeks, 25 days, 175 hours* runs until 29 May. Don't miss it!